

## **AIR TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT ACT**

I would like to commend Senator McCain for moving quickly to deal with FAA reauthorization in a timely manner. If no action is taken, the AIP will expire on March 31, 1999, and airports will not receive much needed federal grants that would allow them to continue to operate both safely and efficiently. The Air Transportation Improvement Act would establish contract authority for the program. Without this authority in place, the FAA cannot distribute airport grants, regardless of whether an AIP appropriation is in place. A lapse in the AIP is unacceptable, and I will work tirelessly to ensure that this does not occur.

This bill reaffirms our commitment that the United States should continue to have the safest and most efficient air transportation system in the world. Although the role of Congress is vital, the FAA has the immediate responsibility for managing the national air transportation system. In very broad terms, the FAA is directly responsible for ensuring the safety, security, and efficiency of civil aviation, and for overseeing the development of a national aviation system.

Another matter requiring immediate attention is the FAA's progress in dealing with the Year 2000 problem. This issue has far reaching safety and economic implications, and has already been the subject of many hearings in Congress. It is imperative that the FAA makes the most out of limited time and resources, and Congress must ensure that this is a top priority. The public is aware of the Year 2000 problem and must be reassured beyond any doubt that it will be possible to fly and, most importantly, to fly in complete safety, on January 1, 2000.

Although this legislation is a positive step forward for our national aviation system, one of my main priorities, which is not included in the Air Transportation Improvement Act, will be to push for an increase in the Passenger Facility Charge (PFC) cap. We must address the widening infrastructure gap that threatens to hamstring our national aviation system. The independent National Civil Aviation Review Commission and the GAO also estimate that there is a backlog in airport improvements of approximately \$3 billion per year. To ensure that our infrastructure deficit can be met, we must look for innovative solutions such as a PFC increase which allow local control and responsibility for improving our national aviation system.

I look forward to working with Senators McCain, Hollings, and Rockefeller to ensure that our common goals of providing a safe and secure aviation system for

both commercial airlines and the general aviation community, as well as providing adequate resources for the FAA to carry out this task, are met.